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## Vital Forces: Marx and the Tension of Capitalist Affect

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**ABSTRACT** This article juxtaposes Marx's critique of capitalism with recent developments in affect theory. My central argument is that a critique of the tension of capitalist affect is fundamental to a Marxian account of capital: on the one hand, capitalism amplifies the potential affective capacity of bodies through its development and organization of productive forces; on the other, it captures this increase to enrich the bourgeoisie, immiserate the proletariat, and reproduce capitalism. I also sketch the ways that an affective interpretation can provide insight into anti-capitalism resistance and post-capitalist life within Marx's theoretical and philosophical project. Ultimately, reading Marx's critique of capitalism for its resonances with Deleuzean-Spinozan affect theory not only generates a newfound apprehension of the affective register of that critique, but also adds to the critical repertoire of affect theory.

"...[E]xperience shows to the intelligent observer how rapidly and firmly capitalist production has seized the vital forces of the people at their very roots."<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: Reading Marx Affectively

Given the centrality of Marx to cultural studies<sup>2</sup> and the prominence of affect theories in recent cultural studies<sup>3</sup>—not to mention work that brings together Marxism and the study of affect and feeling<sup>4</sup>—it is imperative to consider more directly the resonances between Marx's work and affect theory itself. This article argues for reading Marx's analysis as an affective critique of capital that amplifies his accounts of alienation, the appropriation of surplus labor, oppressive factory conditions, and other dimensions of what we conventionally understand to be part of his project. If we theorize central Marxian concepts in relation to affect theory, what features of Marx's project are made uniquely legible? What distinctive concepts and critical articulations emerge from an affective reading of Marx's critique? What is capitalist affect? How could an affective reading of Marx transform cultural studies and related fields such as political theory and critical theory?

I explore these questions and more by juxtaposing Marx with a mode of affect theory emerging from the work of Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, in order to claim Marx as a proto-affect theorist analyzing the capacities of bodies for affecting and being affected in a way that anticipates—and thus offers generative potential contributions for—cultural studies and other endeavors currently engaged with questions of affect. My central argument is that a critique of the tension of capitalist affect is fundamental to a Marxian account of capital: on the one hand, capitalism amplifies the potential affective capacity of bodies through its development and organization of productive forces; on the other, it captures this increase in affective capacity to enrich the bourgeoisie, immiserate the proletariat, and reproduce capitalism. That is, I contend that for Marx (once read through Spinoza and Deleuze), capitalism produces not only particular relations, ideologies,

subjects, and so on, but also produces an intensification and then appropriation of affective capacity.

Kathi Weeks, in her generative book on post- and anti-work imaginaries, insists that we pay attention to the capitalist domination of the worker in terms of more than just a “quantitative” logic of exploitation; instead, domination must also “be grasped in qualitative terms, as attitude, affect, feeling, and symbolic exchange.”<sup>5</sup> This article takes on this task through a return to Marx himself, deploying affect theory to think through Marx’s theoretical project in a way that focuses on affective relations of domination. I also put into practice Jean-François Lyotard’s enthusiastic declaration that “we must come to take Marx as if he were a writer, an author full of affects,” as he charges readers to “show what intensities are lodged in theoretical signs, what affects within serious discourse” since there are “intensities that haunt Marx’s thought.”<sup>6</sup> Staging an encounter between Marx and Spinozan-Deleuzian affect theory, I trace the affectivities, forces, powers, capacities, and intensities that traverse Marx’s works. Such a reading indicates that Marx is indeed a thinker full of affects, enabling a re-articulation of Marx in affective terms and an expanded critical Marxist repertoire for affect theory and cultural studies. Building upon other projects taking up Marx and affect in some way, I suggest that Marx himself can and should be a resource in affect theory’s critical repertoire, given the incisiveness of his attunement to affect that I elucidate throughout the article.<sup>7</sup> In examining the relationship between Marx and Spinoza, Yirmiyahu Yovel argues that the “scholastic bulk of” the volumes of *Capital* can be articulated as “Marx’s own way, following Spinoza, of discussing ethical vision and powerful human aspirations as if they were points, lines, and bodies,” replacing Spinoza’s “*mos geometricus*” with “economic analysis.”<sup>8</sup> Juxtaposing Marx’s critique of capital with affect theory across the one hundred and fifty-odd years between them is what enables this back-and-forth movement.

Such a movement, though, raises a question about what precisely an *affective reading* of Marx entails. I take a cue from Sara Ahmed’s motivating gesture in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in the way she insists we ask the question “what do emotions do,” because rather than thinking of “emotion as being ‘in’ texts” that we can go find or not find in some way, the “emotionality of texts” consists in “how texts are ‘moving’, or how they generate effects.”<sup>9</sup> While this article engages the register of affect instead of emotion, I follow a similar impulse in which the imperative questions to ask are: what might affect do in (and do to) Marx’s theorizing of capitalism?; what effects does an affective interpretation generate?; and how might Marx’s texts themselves move once animated by affect theory? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s introduction to *Touching Feeling* presents an additional impetus at the level of reading practices in her argument for reading “beside” as a way of doing theoretically informed textual interpretation. Reading “beside” facilitates the interaction of multiple potentially-heterogeneous elements in a way that eschews “linear logics,” “dualistic thinking,” the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” and the “fantasy of metonymically egalitarian relations . . . between texts and concepts.”<sup>10</sup> As such, my reading seeks to put (affective) concepts beside (Marx’s) texts to work through the complex relations and track the suggestive resonances between them, that is, to ask what effects affect theory generates alongside Marx’s critique of capital.

Finally, I take these catalysts for my own reading and interpretive practices and put them in practice with Lauren Berlant’s discussion of affect, “cultural Marxism,” and the historical novel.<sup>11</sup> For her, a cultural Marxist analysis engages the historical novel as putting forth “a locus of affective situations that . . . exemplify political and subjective formations,” where affect becomes “the very material of historical embeddedness,” all opening the possibility for an “affectivity of the historical present relayed by an aesthetic transmission.”<sup>12</sup> It thus works as “the aesthetic expression of an affective epistemology” and can “point to a

converging unity of experience in an ongoing moment that could later be called epochal but that at the time marked a shared nervous system that it was the novelist's project to put out there for readers."<sup>13</sup> I suggest that we read Marx himself as, if not as the novelist expressing the aesthetics of epochal affective experience and epistemology,<sup>14</sup> then as the theorist expressing the laws of motion of epochal capitalist affective experience and structures. In my reading below, he theorizes the affective situation exemplifying the capitalist formation that saturates the experiences of laboring subjects in a particular sort of account of the shared nervous system of capitalist affect. It is not only Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, György Lukács, or Benedict Anderson—the cultural Marxists who Berlant points to as exemplars of the analysis of the affectivity of the historical novel—but, I argue, also Marx himself who “enables us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal” phenomenon and to “provid[e] us with an account of the matter of affect as key to reading the historical present.”<sup>15</sup> It is an affective reading, putting affect theory beside Marx's texts and asking what affect theory does to Marx, that I claim opens up this dimension of Marx's work.

## Marx, Affect Theory, and Materialism

In this essay, I work with a Spinozan-Deleuzian trajectory of affect theory.<sup>16</sup> In Deleuze's rendering, Spinoza theorizes bodies in terms of capacity to affect and to be affected (Spinoza's *affectus*), such that bodies interact in encounters that can increase or decrease this capacity (this change in capacity is Spinoza's *affectio*).<sup>17</sup> For Deleuze and Felix Guattari, these Spinozan concepts give rise to a definition of the body as “the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness” and “the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential.”<sup>18</sup> Deleuze describes how for Spinoza the “individual” is:

first of all a singular essence, which is to say, a degree of power. A characteristic relation corresponds to this essence, and a certain capacity for being affected corresponds to this degree of power. [ . . . ] Thus, animals are defined less by the abstract notions of genus and species than by a capacity for being affected, by the affections for which they are ‘capable,’ by the excitations to which they react within the limits of their capacity.<sup>19</sup>

That is, for Deleuze's Spinoza, we must define individuals by their characteristic relations and essential power. As such, “all power [*potentia*] is inseparable from a capacity for being affected.”<sup>20</sup> In a more recent elaboration of this mode of affect theory, Patricia T. Clough conceptualizes affect as “pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body's capacity to act.”<sup>21</sup> This is always a relational notion, for one's capacity to affect and be affected and own affections of which they are capable shape the potential kinds of compositions of bodies and things that may be possible. Consequently, the effects of any composition of individual(s) and object(s) are constituted by the affective capacities of those individuals and objects. A Deleuzian-Spinozan affect theory approaches these kinds of interactions similarly: things “act differently according to the objects encountered” and respond by way of “the affections that come from the objects.”<sup>22</sup> It is this general Deleuzian-Spinozan notion, the capacities of bodies to affect and be affected, to act and be acted upon, that becomes the basis for my interpretation of Marx's theory of capitalist affect.

Why, though, pursue this particular Deleuzian-Spinozan mode of affect theory, rather than the many other possible affective routings? Marx read Spinoza in 1841, specifically the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and some of Spinoza's correspondences.<sup>23</sup> Yovel makes the argument that most readers have systematically underappreciated the Spinozism of Marx, contending that Marx “used Spinoza's thought far more than he admitted” while

making sparse direct reference; even then, Yovel argues “Spinoza is almost always present in Marx’s thought” in a way that “surpasses his direct mention by name” and “underlies the texture of Marx’s thought.”<sup>24</sup> He sees Marx as reorienting a Spinozan philosophy of immanence in a more economic and dialectical way.<sup>25</sup>

Althusser makes several references to Spinoza vis-à-vis Marx in his contributions to *Reading Capital*, and Warren Montag notes in his preface to Étienne Balibar’s *Spinoza and Politics* that Western Marxists have often turned to Spinoza in times of “crisis within Marxism.”<sup>26</sup> The most prominent of the contemporary “Spinozist Marxists” are Hardt and Negri, who, for instance, emphasize Spinozan power and the joyful affects in their theorizing of the revolutionary multitude in their *Empire* trilogy.<sup>27</sup> Frédéric Lordon seeks to use Spinoza to answer a question that constitutes for him a “gap” in Marx, especially important for contemporary capitalism: how do “a few—we call them bosses—have the ‘power’ to convince the many to adopt their employers’ desires as if they were their own and to occupy themselves in their service?”<sup>28</sup> Matthew S. May reads Marx and Spinoza alongside one another to theorize class struggle and the politics of refusal.<sup>29</sup> Given this genealogy, it should not be surprising that I too turn to Spinoza to think with Marx, and more specifically, the Spinoza present in contemporary affect theory transmitted through Deleuze. While these and other readers of Marx examine these resonances with Spinoza, I go further in connecting the two by conceptualizing Marx as an affect theorist in his own right, finding the Deleuzean-Spinozan concept of affect that I find most generative for thinking through Marx’s affective critique of capital.

In making this move, I contest recent readings of Marx and his materialism in critical theory. Jason Edwards argues that if materialisms are “philosophical doctrine[s] that concern the nature and multiform manifestations of matter,” they should have “little to do with historical materialism as an approach to social and political analysis”; in his reading, most attempts to “import into Marxism philosophical conceptions of materialism” have “proven wanting,” unable to apprehend the “systemic” “reproduction of modern capitalist societies” or “social and political...institutions, practices, and trajectories.”<sup>30</sup> Defining “philosophical” materialisms out of historical materialism, he contends, enables a more critical perspective on everyday practices and lived space, particularly in their relations with larger-scale systems. However, I would contend that *without* some account of affective materiality, any historical materialist attempt to grasp the “dense but open totality of material practices that constitute and reproduce a given social formation” proves ineffectual.<sup>31</sup> That is, for a historical materialism lacking something like a Deleuzean-Spinozan-Marxian materialism, a wide set of practices and their bodily effects will always remain inaccessible. My reading of Marx thus works to bridge this possible gap between philosophical/theoretical materialisms and Marxist historical materialism.

Pheng Cheah confronts Marx’s “dialectical materialism” with materialisms from Derrida and Deleuze. His account of Marxist materialism emphasizes it as rational and law-governed, explicable through “empirical science” and focuses on “material reality” as “produced by negativity,” the negation of “given reality or matter” and “imposition of a purposive form” by humans.<sup>32</sup> This rendering of Marx is then contrasted with Derrida’s critique of presence and deconstructive emphasis on radical alterity as well as Deleuze’s ontology of difference and account of the virtual. He classifies these as non-dialectical materialisms that deny the “primacy of the negative” at work in Marx.<sup>33</sup> My own reading of Marxist materialism makes the affective generativity of interactive capacities—*not* negativity on its own—the crucial movement in Marx’s ontology and method. Instead of power as that which “reside[s] in the form of the human subject as the negation of mere matter that nature gives us,” I offer a reading of Marx where power involves the ability to act *and* be acted upon.<sup>34</sup> I thus open Marx up to what Cheah refers to as the generativity

and affirmation of these non-dialectical materialisms. There are, to be sure, still differences between even this affective materialism and the Derridean deconstructive materialism Cheah outlines, although not nearly as much as when he limits Marx's materialism to dialectical negation. More importantly for my purposes, my reading more deeply orients Marx to Cheah's account of Deleuze, for whom matter entails "dynamism consisting of speeds and intensities that open up the composition of any individual being, putting it into different connections with other particles, thereby leading to its recomposition."<sup>35</sup> I move Marx in this direction through Deleuze's Spinoza, making Marx's matter more about intensities and forces that are then organized as compositions that enter into relations with other compositions.

In doing so, I mobilize Deleuze's materialism in an explicitly political direction by bringing it together with the critical power of Marx's project. Indeed, Cheah ends the essay by noting that the political implications of Derrida's and Deleuze's materialisms are difficult to trace. Reading Marx together with Deleuze and Spinoza for an affective Marxist materialism as the rest of this article unfolds will make explicit one mode of politicizing the more radical "force of materiality."<sup>36</sup> Approaching Marx without attending to affect thwarts one from ever opening up this register of vitality in his work. A reading emphasizing affect ensures against reducing Marx's materialism to an inert mechanism or an overly abstract vitalism, and most importantly opens up new possibilities for Marxist critiques of capitalism in affect theory and cultural studies.

## Marx's Affect Theory of Labor<sup>37</sup>

The material conditions in which the body is enmeshed limit its essential powers, and the body-as-affective-capacity does not exist in the same configuration transhistorically, but instead varies in its capacities as well as its expressions and relations of that capacity in response to changing material conditions. The powers of different kinds of bodies in a feudalist social formation will differ from those bodies under capitalism, and both will vary in relation to communist bodies, while the gendering, racialization, sexing, and colonizing of bodies shapes their vital capacities and the way the social and cultural worlds take up those capacities. A Deleuzian-Spinozan reading of Marx directs us to examining the particular configuration and relations of affective capacity of bodies in different epochs, and of course in capitalism most prominently.

When we read Marx affectively, the reach of his critique of capitalism expands. I argue that an affective reading of Marx should lead us to consider a feature of his project beyond our conventional understanding of his critique of alienation, the appropriation of surplus labor, oppressive factory conditions, and so on. In my reading, not only does Marx condemn capitalism for the alienation and exploitation it engenders, but he also identifies and critiques what I will call the tension of capitalist affect. My contention emerges from a close reading, incited by Spinoza and Deleuze, of the linked recurring concepts of living labour, labor power, living labor capacity, vitality/vital forces, and capacity more broadly, primarily as Marx mobilizes them in the *Grundrisse* and the first volume of *Capital*. This cluster of related terms expresses a creative, productive force, and I argue that Marx's account of labor and capitalism can be read as an account of affective capacity. In this register, concepts such as living labor capacity or vital forces become capacities to affect (to create, to give form, to valorize, to give power to, to transfer capacity, to actualize in the produced object, and so on) and to be affected (to enter into relations with the product of labor, with other laborers, with the process of production, and to be changed by these relations). Deleuze's Spinoza seeks to define an individual not in terms of a static classification scheme, but by "the affects of which it is capable," its "affective capacity," the "capacities for affecting and being affected."<sup>38</sup> When we situate this conception on the same plane with Marx's account, I argue we open the way to read the laboring body—in its

living labor capacity and vital forces, especially in the interaction of these capacities with other bodies, with capitalist social formations, and so on—as an affective body, and thus enliven Marx’s critique of capitalism.

My approach resonates with Catherine Chaput’s affective reading of Marx, where she mobilizes a concept of the transmission of affect in relation to Marx’s theory of value in order to examine reality television.<sup>39</sup> I also make a similar move to that of May, who works with Spinozan affect to theorize labor power as “an anonymous aggregate of capacities activated in the process of the production of use-values,” although I present a sustained account of this in terms of Marx’s critique of capital, where May turns to think about labor power as a “surplus” that can underpin class struggle.<sup>40</sup> Finally, I seek to rearticulate the project posed by Marxist feminist Rosemary Hennessy, but in the affective domain. Hennessy contends that we must follow the “relationships of exploitation, domination, and acquisitiveness” as the “kernel” of capital through the ways it “imposes its logic at every ‘level’ of society.”<sup>41</sup> My own reading of Marx’s critique explores how these relations impose themselves at the affective level of society.

An affective reading of Marx also turns the insights of Patricia Clough, Greg Goldberg, Rachel Schiff, Aaron Weeks, and Craig Willse back onto Marx himself.<sup>42</sup> While their “Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself” contrasts affect theory with Marx’s labor theory of value and emphasis on the “body-as-organism,” the critical emphasis of their project merits engagement with Marx’s own texts. The political question their intervention provokes, they argue, is that capitalist “exploitation must be measured along with oppression, domination, mistreatment and misrecognition as matters of affective capacity, a politics of the differential distribution among populations of capacities for living.”<sup>43</sup> I argue that we can read such a critical encounter with capitalism in Marx himself. Even if the affectivity, in Clough et al.’s sense, of Marx’s own account is to some extent limited by his emphasis on the human body, he deeply engages the challenge they posit of “speculat[ing] about the ways in which capital is setting out a domain of investment and accumulation” in terms of affect.<sup>44</sup> He sharply theorizes exploitation in capitalism as a redirection and seizure of affective capacity that appropriates the capacity for living from the population of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. Clough et al. generatively “reconceptualize labor power in relation to affectivity”;<sup>45</sup> it is possible and important that an affective reading of Marx can create a similar rethinking such that labor power in Marx’s texts themselves works in the affective register.

Marx regularly depicts labor power in an abstract sense in terms of bodily capacity. In a general relation to capital, “labour is the merely abstract form . . . which exists only as a capacity, as a resource in the bodiliness of the worker.”<sup>46</sup> Labor power that is “present in time” in a form that will “form the opposite pole to capital” is “*value-creating, productive labour*” and “can be present only in the *living subject*, in which it exists as capacity, as possibility.”<sup>47</sup> That which encounters capital becomes a capacity emanating from the body. Labor-as-capacity situates Marx on a plane with Spinoza’s Deleuze. Marx does not define labor or the laboring body in terms of some static essence or inert property; labor is a dynamic, generative potentiality. What does this labor capacity do? It moves, creates, actualizes, affects, and is affected. When it comes into “contact with capital” as well as means and relations of production, it is “made into a real activity” and “becomes a really value-positing, productive activity.”<sup>48</sup> Labor capacity acts: it is the subjective “activity . . . as the *living source* of value” and “*general possibility* of wealth.”<sup>49</sup>

Labor capacity flows through bodies and relations as a potential power and interacts with other materialities. It is transformed by these interactions, turned as it is into real productive labor and depleted through the activity of laboring. This capacity also transforms those materials through its creative, value-giving power. We can read labor as

affective capacity especially in Marx's account of the absorption of labor by capital in the production process. In "being employed," labor transforms the "raw material" of production by being "materialized" as a "modification of the object" that also "modifies its own form."<sup>50</sup> Here, labor capacity in its actualization affects the material and the labor process. Living labor is also affected by the raw material and by the laboring process. Once "set into motion," labour capacity is "expended" in the form of "the worker's muscular force etc." such that the worker "exhausts himself."<sup>51</sup> In this instance labor capacity is used up in its encounter with material and labour process, and the body it flows through becomes tired and needful of replenishment. That is to say, it affects and is affected, with its powers and capacities constantly reconfigured and reshaped due to its life in a capitalist formation.

## The Critique of Capitalist Affect

Once we read Marx in terms of Deleuzean-Spinozan affect and theorize the body and labor capacity in terms of affective capacity, we articulate new zones of Marx's critique of capitalism. On the one hand, capitalism amplifies the potential affective capacity—understood as the capacity to affect and be affected—of bodies and things through its development and organization of productive forces; on the other, capitalism transforms this increase in productive forces so that it enriches the bourgeoisie while immiserating the proletariat and reproducing capitalism. The amplified force of the laboring body and of the machine is productive, and it affects and is affected by other bodies and machines. Indeed, it does so for Marx to a greater extent under capitalism than at any other point in history. Capitalists, however, redirect these intensified forces and powers for their own enrichment and increased power, while systematically depriving the laboring body of its real capacity to affect and be affected. In "striv[ing] toward the universal development" of productive forces, capital creates the *potential conditions* for bodies and machines to engage in mutual, affectively enriching encounters.<sup>52</sup> In actuality, it seizes this potential for its own perpetuation. Capitalism seizes the vital forces of the affective, material, laboring body, and this constitutes the central injustice of what I argue is Marx's critique of capitalist affect.

Marx, of course, demonstrated a clear awareness of capitalism's world-historical power; his ruthless criticism involves a deep apprehension of the revolutionary force engendered by capitalist formations. This extends to his account of affective capacity under capitalism, which exhibits both an appreciation of the way capitalism amplifies affective capacity and a sharp critique of the capture of affective capacity for a select few. This capture dominates the many and deprives them of the potentially-increased force that capitalism develops.<sup>53</sup> The particular level and configuration of forces involved in labor are constituted historically: all "*natural forces of social labour*" are "historical products."<sup>54</sup> The affective capacity in one social system will differ from that of another epoch. The social formation of capital, in its "universalizing tendency," "strives towards the universal development of the forces of production."<sup>55</sup> In my reading, it seeks to organize bodies and materials such that productive capacity can be maximized: capitalism aims at, and to some extent enacts, a mass amplification of the capacity to affect and be affected.

Deleuze and Guattari theorize that capitalism "brings about the decoding of the flows that the other social formations coded and overcoded," but "it substitutes for the codes an extremely rigid axiomatic that maintains the energy of the flows in a bound state on the body of capital."<sup>56</sup> My own reading of Marx clarifies this sort of articulation of capitalism: the decoding of flows becomes the amplification and proliferation of affective capacity, while the rigid capitalist axiomatic binding energies becomes the redirection and capture of that capacity for the reproduction of capitalist social formation. By combining labor, developing powers, constantly expanding, and so on, capitalism generates this continual

dynamic regeneration of affective capacity in order to perpetuate itself. In constantly encountering and seeking to further displace barriers to its own development and reproduction, capital requires an ever-increasing capture of affect. It “tear[s] down all the barriers which hem in the development of . . . exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.”<sup>57</sup> Capitalism needs labor to be more efficient—to affect and be affected at an ever-increasing rate—if it is to extract more surplus labor and thus reproduce and expand. It needs the creative power of labor capacity to be directed at the creation of goods for capitalist circulation. It requires situating many workers and their capacities together in the same spatial and temporal site to overcome the limits of the working day. Generally, capital “*is productive*” as “*an essential relation for the development of the social productive forces*” and it “incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania” the “development of the productive powers of labour.”<sup>58</sup> Capitalism does not only produce particular social and economic relations, or particular forms of ideology, or specific types of worker-subjects, but also directly produces an intensification of affective capacity.

The very “concept of capital” contains “the concentration of many living labour capacities.”<sup>59</sup> Viewed as a general society-wide formation, it demands an amplification of these forces directed to its own reproduction and expansion. Capital does more than this, however; it also comes to posit itself as the exclusive agent conducting this power. In doing so it conceals the actual bodies generating and actualizing these forces as well as the effects on these bodies of capitalist processes. All the “social powers of production are productive powers of capital,” and the “collective power of labour” becomes “the *collective power* of capital.”<sup>60</sup> Capitalist processes collectivize and increase affective capacity in a particular mode of production, then put it to work for the benefit of capitalists and the extension of capitalism, but in a way such that capitalism itself appears as the bearer of this power. The individual body realizes the capacity of living labor, but capitalism seizes this force as its own. By placing a mass of workers in the same location and compelling them to work toward the same end and in the same production process, “capital appears as the collective force of the workers, their social force, as well as that which ties them together, and hence as the unity which creates this force.”<sup>61</sup> In the process of amplifying affective capacity, capital comes to posit itself as the vehicle for and unifying energy behind this collective force. Doing this renders the actual forces themselves—those of laboring bodies—invisible in an affective form of fetishism. By standing in as the representation and unity of concentrated forces that in reality results from an actualization of labor capacities in the form of exploited, alienated laboring bodies, capitalism conceals the fact that the amplification of overall or total capacity it engenders also directly enervates and destroys the very bodies from which this affective capacity was extracted and realized for profit and further growth.

Upon this reading, alienation in Marx’s works takes on a particularly affective character, as a force that confronts and opposes the laborer: capitalism alienates the worker from their material affective capacity, then opposes a warped affective force against the worker. As a result of the division of labor, a laborer’s “own deed”—read: actualization of affective capacity—“becomes an alien power opposed to him”; the combined efforts of laborers comprise a “social power” that “appears to these individual[s] . . . not as their own united power, but as alien force existing outside them” that becomes “the prime governor” of human “will and action.”<sup>62</sup> The language used by Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts* consistently depicts alienation in terms of external force, marking it as “an alien object exercising power,” in terms of the “product of labor;” an “alien activity not belonging to” the worker when it comes to the “act of production;” and a “being *alien* to him” when discussing species-being.<sup>63</sup> Similar formulations persist in the later Marx: for example, in the *Grundrisse*, the “product of labour . . . endowed by living labour” becomes “an *alien property*” and “labour in general . . . comes to confront the worker as an *alien power*.”<sup>64</sup>



This external force confronts the worker and drains them of affective capacity. Alienated labor is “*external* to the worker” in a way that, instead of “develop[ing] freely his physical and mental energy,” “mortifies his body.”<sup>65</sup>

Alienation thus describes in some ways the embodied experience of the worker in capitalism subject to the seizure or redirection of their affective capacity. Not only do social relations and productive processes capture the ability to act and be acted upon, this process on a mass scale poses an affective force against the worker that enervates their own capacity. As Sara Ahmed notes, alienation in Marx is both alienation vis-à-vis labor in “a kind of self-estrangement” and is “a feeling-structure, a form of suffering that shapes how the worker inhabits the world” given that “the world they have created is an extension of themselves . . . that is appropriated.”<sup>66</sup> For Marx, the “collisions” between individuals “produce an alien power standing above them,” a “process and power independent of them.”<sup>67</sup> The worker puts their life—their dynamic mattering, material productive force—into labor, but this results in confrontation with an alien force. Living labour capacity becomes separated from “its own labour,” “alien to it”; as a result, it “has become poorer by the life forces expended” and transferred to the alien product, process, and force.<sup>68</sup> Alienated labor means that instead of the laboring body realizing its capacity or power, labor wrests and appropriates this affective force in a way that both lessens the capacity of that body and poses as a warped, confrontational alien power against it. The “social relation of individuals to one another” has become, in a perversion of the potentiality and relational connectivity of affective force, a “power over the individuals which has become autonomous” of them.<sup>69</sup> Marx’s account of alienation, like his broader critique of capitalism, centrally engages and works through the dynamics of affect. In the “production process of capital,” labor “appears just as subservient to and led by an alien will and an alien intelligence” in the form of an “*animated monster*.”<sup>70</sup> This alien(ation) monster, like the capital-as-vampire figure below, feeds on affective capacity.

It is in these many senses of capitalist affect that, as marked in the epigraph from *Capital* that opens this article, “capitalist production” has “rapidly and firmly...seized the vital forces of the people at their very roots.”<sup>71</sup> When Marx makes this claim, we should read it affectively. Vital forces are not (or at least not only) metaphorical, nor does the statement refer exclusively to the way capitalism oppresses the proletariat (although it certainly does that). Capitalism captures the essential powers of individual bodies, their capacity to affect and be affected; it is the usurpation of creative, generative, affective force. It makes labor capacity a force for capital alone. We might thus say that one defining characteristic of the proletariat as a class is its particular mode of enmeshment in these capitalist affective flows. That is, one component of the class status or process of the proletariat is that one’s affective capacities are amplified, but this power is captured for the reproduction of capital and enrichment of another affective class at the expense of one’s own body. The worker becomes “nothing other than labour-power for the duration of [their] whole life,” directing all the worker’s time and activity—education, intellectual development, sleep, social intercourse, the “free play of the vital forces” of “body and mind,” and so on—to the “self-valorization of capital.”<sup>72</sup> Capitalism is affective and cannot exist outside of the concomitant intensification and redirection of capacity.

When capital and labor encounter one another under conditions of capitalism, capital “buys [labour] as living labour, as the general productive force,” while the worker sells their labor and thus “surrenders its *creative power*.”<sup>73</sup> In this exchange, the creative power of labor capacity “establishes itself as the power of capital,” and “capital appropriates [labour as productive force], as such.”<sup>74</sup> The buying and selling of labor power is also the appropriation by capital of affective capacity. The purchase by capital is a procurement of the worker’s “vitality,” the “objectified labour contained in his vital

forces”; capital “realizes itself through the *appropriation of alien*” living labour capacity.<sup>75</sup> It depends on this affective capture for its own perpetuation. Consequently, “every increase in the powers of social production . . . the *productive power of labour itself*”—and as I have discussed, this increase is something required and continually produced by capitalism—“enriches not the worker but rather *capital*; hence it only magnifies again the power dominating over labour; increases only the productive power of capital.”<sup>76</sup> Cheah, without making recourse to affect theory, argues that capital “appropriate[s] the source of life,” by “parasitically draining the life and labor” in a way that “trausmute[s] capital into a vital being.”<sup>77</sup> Affect helps to explain how this process works. Any amplification of affective capacity accrues to capital at the expense of the worker, and any increase in the power of the worker increases the power of capital and its domination of labor. Capitalist processes appropriate the worker’s vital forces and essential powers. As Negri contends, “Capital can only subtract life, can only mortify labor.”<sup>78</sup> If we read Marx across his works as exploring the relationships of economic and social power, then we must theorize this affective component of that power that I have elucidated. Ultimately, the “natural animating power of labour...becomes a *power of capital*, not of labour.”<sup>79</sup> Capitalism seizes the “value-creating possibility . . . which lies within” the laboring body and becomes “master over living labour capacity.”<sup>80</sup> It engages in the constant capture of affective capacity, and this constitutes a central mode of Marx’s critique of capital in my reading.

Sean Grattan argues that much of Spinozist Marxism—especially that of Negri, writing with and without Hardt—effaces the way that affect is not only joyful encounters or increases in the power to act; Spinoza also carefully theorizes the ways that encounters may be and often are harmful and diminishing of the power to act.<sup>81</sup> The problem is that avoiding the possibility of harmful or sad encounters, or erasing them from one’s theory, as Grattan asserts Spinozist Marxism too often does, cannot in fact rid the world of sad affects and harmful encounters. Instead, because they are part of existence, “coming to terms with potential causes of sad affects is crucial to critical practice.”<sup>82</sup> This is one of the reasons that I find it so necessary to go back to Marx himself in relation to affect and to Spinoza. As I have demonstrated, Marx is perhaps the most incisive critical analyst of the material practices, relations, and conditions that organize life as a series of sad affects and harmful encounters. Ruddick notes that the turn to Spinoza in critical theory has “invigorated a radical ethico-politics of ontology,” one “embracing . . . an indwelling, vital, and immanent concept of power as *potentia*” that is “set against a parasitic capitalism.”<sup>83</sup> Marx, I contend, provides a uniquely important mode of such theorizing given his vivid articulation of what I have called the tension of capitalist affect. Any affect theory proceeding from Spinoza will benefit from the sort of encounter with Marx that I have elaborated. That is, once we read Marx’s critique of capitalism for its resonances with Deleuzian-Spinozan affect, not only do we generate a newfound apprehension of the affective register of that critique, but also add to the critical repertoire of affective approaches in cultural theory.

My reading of Marx also works through some of the tensions between more structural and more affective modes of cultural, political, and social theories, more specifically about the possibility of affect theory being part of structural or quasi-structural analysis. My argument is, in many ways, a structural one, following Marx: capitalism systematically organizes, amplifies, and captures affect, in a way that maps onto Marx’s structural theorizing about class positions within capitalism. This is tension with affect theory, for example in the way that Massumi counterposes “cultural theory” focuses on “structure”—in which he claims “nothing ever happens” and “all eventual permutations are prefigured via self-consistent generative rules”—to affect as a “collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox.”<sup>84</sup> In this sense, bringing together affect theory and a structural understanding of Marx becomes quite complicated.

My claim is that an affective reading of Marx can help bridge this divide, even as these tensions remain inextricable. Massumi notes that while “affect is indeed unformed and unstructured . . . it is nevertheless highly organized and effectively analyzable.”<sup>85</sup> I understand my reading of Marx to be a quasi-structural analysis of the organization of affect under capitalism at a very general level. Even though affect always exceeds any attempts at containing it, this should not preclude attempts to theorize large-scale political, social, and economic patternings of affective flows. Massumi closes the chapter I have been quoting in this section by claiming that affect has the “ability . . . to produce an economic effect more swiftly than economics itself” and is thus “a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory”; affect is maybe even “beyond infrastructural, it is everywhere, in effect.”<sup>86</sup> I would argue that affectively returning to Marx provides one important route for taking on the task of analyzing affect as infrastructural to capitalism and a real condition of economic existence. In this sense, this is an analogous approach to that of Williams with his concept of a structure of feeling, as he too works to provide a structural analysis of bodily experience. If I am right that Marx is theorizing capitalism as a social formation that amplifies affective capacities, but at the same times captures it from those actualizing such potentials, then affect is indeed “everywhere, in effect,” to use Massumi’s phrase. At the same time, I argue that my reading also responds to the critique that work bringing philosophical concepts about materialism into Marx has been unable to understand systemic processes and social totalities.<sup>87</sup> Instead, I find affect theory to be a crucial tool for making legible large-scale processes that are constitutive of capitalism, even if elements of affect theory push against the structural dimensions of that analysis.

Ultimately, capitalism produces a “throng of people . . . made up of generations of stunted, short-lived and rapidly replaced human beings, plucked, so to speak, before they were ripe.”<sup>88</sup> In its ongoing need to absorb and put to use labor capacity, capitalist production quickly uses up the forces of the body themselves, “shortening the life of labour-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility.”<sup>89</sup> Capitalism requires the amplification of affective capacity, but in realizing this necessity it depletes the source from which it seizes that capacity in the first place. Marx intensely describes this depletion of forces and bodies: capitalism “oversteps . . . the merely physical limits of the working day,” granting only “the exact amount of torpor essential to the revival of an absolutely exhausted organism” and leaving only “diseased, compulsory and painful” labour-power, “produc[ing] the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself.”<sup>90</sup> Perhaps when Marx writes about the “vampire-like” quality of capital, the way it “lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks,” we ought to think of capital as the affect vampire, sucking the capacity, force, and power from the depleted bodies it leaves behind.<sup>91</sup>

## Toward Communal Affect

Of course, for Marx, Capital “possesses” this “tendency” towards the “free, unobstructed, progressive, and universal development” of productive force, but “since capital is a limited form of production,” this tendency “contradicts it and hence drives it towards dissolution.”<sup>92</sup> Capitalism initiates a movement of capacities and powers in the direction of their universal development, which would in turn generate real freedom. However, it seeks to halt this movement, appropriating these intensified forces and destroying the bodies realizing them. This, Marx argues, proves impossible; once unleashed, these affective capacities will work towards their own realization in free conditions, overthrowing the capitalist formation seeking to contain and capture them. In the register of Clough et al.’s “affect-itself,” we might call this movement in Marx his recognition of the way that “with each actualization, there remains a virtual remainder of affective

potential,” the “openness of bodily matter to its own unstable, pre-individual capacities” such that affect works as “potentiality, indeterminate emergence, and creative mutation.”<sup>93</sup> If capitalism “produces, above all, its own grave-diggers” then its death is in part affective, and the grave-diggers include the renewed communist force of proletarian affective capacity.<sup>94</sup>

I suggest that theorizing Marx’s account of the overcoming of capitalism—and, perhaps more importantly, theorizing agency, organization, and resistance for us, one hundred and fifty-odd years after the publication of the first volume of *Capital*—requires grappling with the affectivity of capitalism and of struggle against capitalism. If my reading is correct such that we should supplement Marx’s accounts of exploitation and alienation with one of the contradictions of capitalist affect, then this turn to affect should extend to theorizing anti- and post-capitalisms. To continue along the lines sketched out throughout this article, future work should juxtapose, on the one hand, Spinoza and Deleuze on affect, common notions, the individual, and joyful encounters with, on the other hand, Marx on communism, the Paris Commune, machines, radical politics, and more—as Matthew May has done, thinking through Spinoza, Marx, and class struggle in an affective way.<sup>95</sup> If capitalism systematically amplifies affective capacity and force but redirects this intensified force for its own reproduction while destroying the bodies that actualize such a capacity, then a future communal society would (among other things) coordinate productive activity so that intensified affective capacity and productive force are organized to feed back into the development of individual bodies and the overall cooperative augmentation of the forces of society. The communal society of the future would be one in which, to rephrase Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*, we shall have an association, in which the free development of affective capacities realized by each is the condition for the free development of affective capacity for all.<sup>96</sup> That is, in communism bodies affect and are affected by other bodies such that their individual and collective powers are continually augmented. This would entail not only the communal direction of the means of production, but also the communal amplifications of affect, force, and capacity.

When we surpass “the limited bourgeois form,” we find—in a passage that would be just as at home in Spinoza, or in Deleuze and Guattari—the “universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces,” the “absolute working-out of” the “creative potentialities” of human bodies, the “development of all human powers as such the end in itself,” and the individual who “strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming.”<sup>97</sup> We should, ultimately, read such an expansive vision affectively, especially considering the vivid resonances between Marx and Deleuzian-Spinozan affect that I have traced throughout this essay. What is the communal development and becoming of creative potentialities, capacities, and human powers in themselves, if not a Spinozan ethic where “powers, speeds, and slownesses [are] composed” such that “individuals enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum” and “capacities can compound directly to constitute a more ‘intense’ capacity or power”?<sup>98</sup> The free development of the individual and the community in Marx is in part a development of affect, constantly raising bodies in their individuality and relationality to higher, more intense capacities and power. From the standpoint of Deleuze and Spinoza, affective capacity is in the end never a matter of the disconnected or atomized body for which another poses a limit or constraint, nor of “utilizations or captures,” but “of sociabilities and communities.”<sup>99</sup> The *community* of a post-capitalist Marxist vision would involve a set of affective relations that reciprocally amplify affective capacity, creating sociabilities that mutually enrich individual and collective powers.

An affective reading of Marx alone, however, will be an insufficient critical resource for such a post-capitalist imaginary. Not all bodies circulate, produce, and interact in the same way within the relations and modes of capitalist affect. Gendered, sexed, sexualized, racialized, colonized bodies experience and are constituted by the affective structures of any mode of production in polyvalent ways. That is, there is not a singular capitalist body, proletariat body, or bourgeois body. If the concept of the “the body” becomes too universalized, too singular, too abstract—temptations that are easy to succumb to in theorizing about affect and embodiment, this article included—it is easy to conceal the ways in which bodies are always already multiply gendered, racialized, sexualized, and so forth. There is no guarantee that certain modes of theorizing affect can or necessarily will interrogate these dynamics. While I believe that the affective reading of Marx is a fundamental part of radical critique and world-building one hundred and fifty years after *Capital*, it can only be one problematic aspect of it. Future work should juxtapose an affective reading of Marx with work from women of color feminists, postcolonial and decolonial theorists, Marxist and socialist feminists, queer theorists, and theorists of racial capitalism, particularly in the ways that affect figures into these projects.<sup>100</sup> Only such an expansive project could prefigure a present of resistance or a future of affective community.

## Conclusion: Cultural Theory and the Affective Marx

To conclude, I turn to think more directly about what an affective Marx can do for cultural (and social and political) theory and cultural studies, especially considering the prominence of Marx and of affect in cultural studies. Perhaps most notably, an affective reading of Marx constructs another theoretical vector into the analysis of structures of feeling, routed not just through Williams but also through Marx himself. If, for Williams, such inquiry is “talking about . . . specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought,” and does so “as a ‘structure,’” then a theorization of capitalist affect provides a further analytical resource for interrogating the systematic conditions for affective experience.<sup>101</sup> Williams contends that structures of feeling constitute “a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension . . . which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies.”<sup>102</sup> This article has sought to theorize the internal relations of capitalist affect and the way it conditions bodily experiences, in its interlockings, tensions, and hierarchies. Such an affective reading of Marx also works against the tendency Williams identifies of a Marxist “reduction of the social to fixed forms” by thinking through the ways that affect is always potentially in excess of its captures.<sup>103</sup> While this affective reading may not always be able to help think through the way that structures of feeling are “a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social” because of the more structural account I have given, it can enrich the theoretical resources for the more formal elements of felt experience within capitalism formations, by providing a grid of intelligibility for the flows, disruptions, appropriations, potentialities, and channelings of affect.<sup>104</sup>

An affective reading of Marx may also supplement or extend—and itself be supplemented by—more fine-grained material analyses. For instance, Peter Stallybrass engages with Marx’s coat, both as an example of the commodity-form in the first volume of *Capital* and Marx’s own overcoat on its way in and out of pawn, in order to puzzle through the way that capitalism is both “the most abstract society that has ever existed” and also “a society that consumes ever more concrete human bodies.”<sup>105</sup> The coat becomes an exemplar of the commodity as “the abstract ‘cell-form’ of capitalism,” but Stallybrass tracks the material things of Marx and his family in order to insist on these objects as “the materials

... from which one constructed a life” against the “annihilation of the self” induced by capitalist abstraction and oppression.<sup>106</sup> I would suggest that affect is a significant conceptual resource for tracking both movements Stallybrass concerns himself with: an affective Marx can trace the abstract macro-level structuring patterned by capitalism at the same time it always refers back to the bodies being consumed and destroyed by capitalism.

In a different vein, reconstructing Marx in an affective vein might address problems in Marx’s conception of labor identified by Carolyn Steedman in her analysis of English tax law and accounts of the labor performed by domestic servants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>107</sup> She critiques Marx’s (and Adam Smith’s) notion of labor for failing to account for the labor done by domestic laborers, because Marx emphasized labor-power as an “abstract capacity or ability” that is realized when it “is congealed, or crystallized, into a thing, or object”; the labor of a domestic worker, because it does not “produce vendible things” in this way, marks “an absence” in Marx’s theorizing. Conversely, English tax law did account for the labor of servants in the way it “named a worker’s skills and capacities, what he or she *actually did* in the labour of service” as the defining characteristic of labor.<sup>108</sup> My reading of Marx has the potential to reconfigure Marx to be able to more greatly account for the bodily affectively capacities of the laborer in a way that can partially account for the work of servants that Steedman argues a conventional version of Marx’s theory of labor fails to recognize. The *general* capacity to affect and be affected is amplified and appropriated by capitalism for both the industrial and domestic worker, even if the *particular* modalities and realizations of that capacity differs greatly between them.<sup>109</sup> Both are subject to and subjected by the tension of capitalist affect, and future work could map out the precise relations between those two different kinds of labor-as-affective-capacity.

A theme emerges from these brief engagements with Williams, Stallybrass, and Steedman: a Spinozan-Deleuzean reading of Marx and affect constitutes a powerful conceptual resource for cultural theory and cultural studies, but must be further articulated and contextualized through fine-grained, materialist analyses of particular configurations of culture, labor, and affect. The theoretical provocation of exploring Marx’s critique of capitalist affect must be fleshed out if it is to fully grapple with “specific feelings, specific rhythms . . . [and] specific kinds of sociality,” the affect or “material memory . . . literally embodied in the commodity,” or the “practical philosophy of the servant’s labour.”<sup>110</sup> An analysis of the vital forces amplified and then appropriated in the tension of capitalist affect is a vital tool for cultural analysis, and moving forward, its conceptual power must be actualized in engagements with concrete cultural practices. Berlant discusses the Marxist tradition as “offer[ing] multiple ways to engage the affective aspects of class antagonism, labor practices, and a communally generated class feeling that emerges from inhabiting a zone of lived structure.”<sup>111</sup> We must add Marx himself to the repertoire of this mode of cultural, social, and political theorizing on affect: he is, I have argued, a foundational theorist of the affectivity of class, labor, structure, oppression, and feeling under capitalism.

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editorial team for their constructive criticisms and the improvements to the manuscript that resulted from their reviews.

## Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 380. [↗](#)
2. For example, Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). [↗](#)
3. For example, Ann Cvetkovich, "Affect," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, 2nd ed. (New York and London: NYU Press, 2014), 13–16; Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2010). [↗](#)
4. Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), chap. 7; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, chap. II.9. [↗](#)
5. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 236n11. [↗](#)
6. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 95; 103–104. [↗](#)
7. Catherine Chaput, "Affect and Belonging in Late Capitalism: A Speculative Narrative on Reality TV," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1–20; Patricia Ticineto Clough et al., "Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 60–77; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Antonio Negri, "Value and Affect," trans. Michael Hardt, *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 77–88; Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, trans. Gabriel Ash (London and New York: Verso, 2014). [↗](#)
8. Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Volume 2: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 98. [↗](#)
9. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4; 14. [↗](#)
10. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7–8. On the "hermeneutics of suspicion," see "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling*, 123–51. [↗](#)
11. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 63–69. [↗](#)
12. *Ibid.*, 66–67. [↗](#)
13. *Ibid.*, 64; 66. [↗](#)
14. Although, note that Cvetkovich reads Marx's *Capital* as a kind of Victorian "sensation narrative." Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*, chap. 7. [↗](#)
15. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 64. [↗](#)
16. On the multiple approaches and orientations to affect theory, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 6–8; and Marianne Liljeström, "Affect," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–38. The works of Patricia T. Clough and Brian Massumi present some of the more prominent

contemporary illustrations of this Spinozan-Deleuzean approach in cultural theory: Patricia Ticineto Clough, "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 206–25; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002). [↗](#)

17. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988). [↗](#)
18. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 260. [↗](#)
19. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 27. Deleuze also writes, "... define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change. You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable. Affective capacity, with a maximum threshold and a minimum threshold, is a constant notion in Spinoza" (124–25). [↗](#)
20. *Ibid.*, 97. [↗](#)
21. Clough, "The Affective Turn," 207. [↗](#)
22. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 21. [↗](#)
23. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Volume 2*, 78; Bill Bowring, "What If Ilyenkov Had Known Marx's Transcriptions of Spinoza?," *Al-Farabi* 1, no. 45 (2014): 24–26. [↗](#)
24. *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Volume 2*, 78–79; 200n4. The most prominent citation occurs in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, where Marx contends that the "identity of production and consumption amounts to Spinoza's thesis: *determinatio est negatio*," with a footnote referring to a 1674 letter from Spinoza to Jelles. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 90; 90n11. [↗](#)
25. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Volume 2*, chap. 4. Deleuze and Guattari read Spinoza as the foremost philosopher of immanence: "Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher: he showed, drew up, and thought the 'best' plane of immanence—that is, the purest, the one that does not hand itself over to the transcendent or restore any transcendent, the one that inspires the fewest illusions, bad feelings, and erroneous perceptions" *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 60. Notably, one of Althusser's discussions about Marx and Spinoza situate them both as thinkers of a kind of immanence, albeit within Althusser's structuralism. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 187–89. [↗](#)
26. Althusser, *Reading Capital*; Warren Montag, "Preface," in *Spinoza and Politics*, by Etienne Balibar (London and New York: Verso, 2008), ix. For instance, Althusser writes that Spinoza and Marx provide the great, "unprecedented theoretical revolution{s}," and in this sense, "from the philosophical standpoint" we "can regard Spinoza as Marx's only direct ancestor." Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 102. [↗](#)
27. Hardt and Negri, *Empire; Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004); Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). Negri has long been a prominent theorist of Spinoza, including his book-length treatment of Spinoza, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1991), which contains only a few mentions of Marx but does make the intriguing gesture to a Machiavelli-Spinoza-Marx "vein of thought" that "counters the 'sublime'" tradition of Hobbes-Rousseau-Hegel (265n26). [↗](#)
28. Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital*, x. [↗](#)



29. Matthew S. May, "Spinoza and Class Struggle," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2009): 204–8. [↗](#)
30. Jason Edwards, "The Materialism of Historical Materialism," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 281. [↗](#)
31. Ibid., 291. [↗](#)
32. Pheng Cheah, "Non-Dialectical Materialism," in *New Materialisms*, 71. [↗](#)
33. Ibid., 71. [↗](#)
34. Ibid., 79. [↗](#)
35. Ibid., 87. [↗](#)
36. Ibid., 89. [↗](#)
37. Thanks to Alyson Cole for suggesting this phrase to describe my account of affect and Marx's living labor capacity. [↗](#)
38. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 124. [↗](#)
39. Chaput, "Affect and Belonging in Late Capitalism." [↗](#)
40. May, "Spinoza and Class Struggle," 205. [↗](#)
41. Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 17. [↗](#)
42. Clough et al., "Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself." [↗](#)
43. Ibid., 75. [↗](#)
44. Ibid., 62. [↗](#)
45. Ibid., 62. [↗](#)
46. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 298. [↗](#)
47. Ibid., 272 (emphasis in original). Interestingly, immediately after this formulation in the *Grundrisse*, Marx notes that "this marginal remark is an anticipation, must first be developed, by and by." Even in the text itself, Marx creates openings for lines of flight that he may only anticipate and which need some further development. Clearly, many of these anticipations are taken up and elaborated in the volumes of *Capital*. I seek to explicitly pursue the affective anticipations of such remarks. [↗](#)
48. Ibid., 298. [↗](#)
49. Ibid., 296 (emphasis in original). [↗](#)
50. Ibid., 300. [↗](#)
51. Ibid. [↗](#)
52. Ibid., 540. [↗](#)
53. Lordon also discusses capitalist "capture" in terms of affect. Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital*, 117–21. He argues that analysis of the employment relation demands a theory of capture which specifies the object of master/employer capture as the "power of acting" of employees so that the "conative energies of others work" in the "service" of the "master-desire" (117). While I think this is generally correct, I disagree with Lordon in his claim that Marx himself does not have a theory of capture in his account of capitalist exploitation. As I demonstrate throughout this section of the article, Marx's critique of capitalism includes a wide-ranging analysis of the capitalist capture of affect, even if he never explicitly names it as such. Part of the problem is that Lordon limits his engagement with Marx at this part of his book to the appropriation of surplus value. What Lordon understands as an "impasse" in Marx is an underappreciation of the potential for an affective theory of exploitation in Marx himself (120). It would be generative, I think, to read my and Lordon's

accounts together to think about the way that the capitalist capture of affect I theorize in Marx works to shape what we might call, using London, the conatus of capitalism itself. If capitalism has a conative impetus to persist in its being, then turning the conatus of workers against themselves and towards the capture of affect that reproduces capitalism and enables it to endure would be crucial. ↗

54. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 400 (emphasis in original). ↗
55. Ibid., 540. ↗
56. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1983), 245–46. ↗
57. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 410. ↗
58. Ibid., 325 (emphasis in original). ↗
59. Ibid., 590. ↗
60. Ibid., 585 (emphasis in original). ↗
61. Ibid., 587. ↗
62. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 53–54. ↗
63. Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 75–77 (emphasis in original). ↗
64. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 453; 307 (emphasis in original). ↗
65. Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74. ↗
66. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 167. For a different reading of affect and alienation, see London, *Willing Slaves of Capital*. ↗
67. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 197. ↗
68. Ibid., 462. ↗
69. Ibid., 197. ↗
70. Ibid., 470 (emphasis in original) ↗
71. Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 380. ↗
72. Ibid., 375. ↗
73. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 307 (emphasis in original) ↗
74. Ibid. ↗
75. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 323; 307 (emphasis in original). ↗
76. Ibid., 308 (emphasis in original). ↗
77. Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 197–98. ↗
78. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, “It’s a Powerful Life: A Conversation on Contemporary Philosophy,” *Cultural Critique* 57, no. 1 (2004): 180. ↗
79. *Grundrisse*, 357 (emphasis in original). ↗
80. Ibid., 453. ↗
81. Sean Grattan, “The Indignant Multitude: Spinozist Marxism after Empire,” *Mediations* 25, no. 2 (2011): 7–8. ↗
82. Ibid., 7. ↗
83. “The Politics of Affect: Spinoza in the Work of Negri and Deleuze,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 4 (2010): 24. ↗
84. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 27. For more on Massumi’s critique of structural cultural and social theory, see 68–70. ↗
85. Ibid., 260n3. ↗
86. Ibid., 45. ↗
87. Edwards, “The Materialism of Historical Materialism.” ↗
88. Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 380. ↗
89. Ibid., 376. ↗

90. Ibid., 375–76. [↗](#)
91. Ibid., 342. [↗](#)
92. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 540. [↗](#)
93. Clough et al., “Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself,” 65. Also see May, “Spinoza and Class Struggle.” [↗](#)
94. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1948), 483. [↗](#)
95. May, “Spinoza and Class Struggle.” [↗](#)
96. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 491. [↗](#)
97. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, ed. A.J.P. Taylor (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 94. [↗](#)
98. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 126. [↗](#)
99. Ibid. [↗](#)
100. To highlight just two generative interventions in these areas, see Colin Patrick Ashley and Michelle Billies, “The Affective Capacity of Blackness,” *Subjectivity* 10, no. 1 (2017): 63–88; Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012). [↗](#)
101. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132. [↗](#)
102. Ibid. [↗](#)
103. Ibid., 129. [↗](#)
104. Ibid., 132 (emphasis in original). [↗](#)
105. Peter Stallybrass, “Marx’s Coat,” in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 183. [↗](#)
106. Ibid., 202–3. [↗](#)
107. Carolyn, Steedman, “The Servant’s Labour: The Business of Life, England, 1760–1820,” *Social History* 29, no. 1 (2004): 1–29. [↗](#)
108. Ibid., 4–7. [↗](#)
109. This is suggestive of an affective reading of Marx recalibrating contemporary scholarship on affective labor in light of a more affective reading of Marx, e.g., Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *Boundary* 226, no. 2 (1999): 89–100; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 290–92. This could involve challenging accounts of affective labor that temporalize it in late capitalism, post-Fordist, and/or neoliberal configurations to consider the ways that there is also a kind of affective labor undergone by the industrial worker in the nineteenth century as well, even if the particular affects are qualitatively different than those of the contemporary childcare worker, migrant domestic worker, or Facebook employee, but are nonetheless affective from the standpoint of my interpretation of Marx. [↗](#)
110. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133; Stallybrass, “Marx’s Coat,” 202; Steedman, “The Servant’s Labour,” 4. [↗](#)
111. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 64. [↗](#)

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